

When, the monthly "Diner des Auteurs Siffle^{V5}" was resumed in March, 1882, the two stock subjects of conversation, says Goncourt, were death and love. And the hypochondriasis from which Zola was suffering, which had declared itself at the time of his mother's death and had recently compelled him to put "La Joie de Vivre" aside, now became painfully manifest. An unreasoning fear of death, and, it would seem, even of suffering pursued him. Somewhat later (in 1885) and apropos of the terrible, lingering death of Jules Yalles, who in the midst of a friendly conversation would suddenly blanch with dread as if he could see death approaching him, Zola said to Goncourt: "Ah! to be struck down suddenly, as Flaubert was, that is the death one should desire."¹ This wish, we know, was ultimately granted. But in 1882, according to Goncourt, Zola, who believed that he had a complaint of the heart, was tortured by the idea of "a sudden and violent death which would fall upon him before he had finished his work." Again, we know that such a fate did ultimately befall him; but Goncourt tells us that, at the period we have now reached, the thought of it haunted him to such a degree that "since the death of his mother, whose coffin it had been necessary to bring down by way of the

window (there being only a narrow, winding staircase at Mddan, in spite of all its embellishments), he had never since been able to set eyes on that window without wondering who would soon be lowered from it, himself or his wife. 'Yes,' he said, 'since that day the thought of death is always lurking in our minds. "We now invariably keep a light burning in our bedroom, and very often, when I look at my wife before she

¹ "Jtmrnal des Goncourt," Vol. VII, p. 11.